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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC AND TASKFORCE-1

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [RU](#) [GG](#)  
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: SITREP 11: RUSSIANS HOLD IN PLACE,  
CONTROL ROADS WHILE WAITING FOR ORDERS

REF: TBILISI 1379

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (SBU) Summary: There were few reports of Russian troops movements on August 17, following a day of conflicting reports on the status, location, and direction of Russian forces in Georgia. It is clear that Russian troops control the east-west corridor through Georgia from Poti north and east and all around Gori. UNOMIG observers have seen Russian regular forces establishing installations and gun emplacements on the main east-west highway south of Zugdidi; Georgian Government officials report that Russian troops are in Kashuri and at key road junctions between Poti, Kutaisi and Senaki. UNOMIG also reports the Coast Guard station in Poti is now deserted and the Zugdidi sector is relatively calm. Russians continue to refuse OSCE entrance to Gori, although an EU delegation and Ambassador Richard Holbrooke were able to visit the city the evening of August 16. Russian forces blew up a railroad bridge east of Gori on August 16. GOG reports indicate Russian helicopters started additional fires near the village of Kaspi. Approximately 400 hectares are now burning in the Borjomi-Kharagauli national park, and Russian forces have reportedly refused to allow Turkish and Ukrainian firefighting airplanes to combat the fires. Amcits in the region are safe and accounted for. Distinguished visitors continue to arrive to Tbilisi, including German Chancellor Merkel and U.S. Senator Joseph Biden. The press is reporting that UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown will visit August 18. Late breaking press reports state that the Russians have agreed to begin leaving August 18. This sitrep covers events since the late afternoon of August 16 (reftel). End Summary.

12. (C) The Georgian government reported that Russian troops, and 60 vehicles, have moved into Akhlagori near the southeast part of South Ossetia. The troops are distributing Russian passports, flying Ossetian flags, and telling the Georgians there to accept the passports or get out. Additional GOG reports claim that Russian troops are also moving to the village of Sachkhere on the western side of South Ossetia. The GOG is concerned about this activity, as they believe Russia will try and expand its control over these large, traditional Georgian villages. (Note: Post is attempting to obtain independent confirmation of these events. End note.) Russian forces and trucks have also reportedly gone through Khashuri and the Rikoti tunnel, which divides Eastern and Western Georgia. GOG reported additional looting and abuse of civilians by separatists overnight in the villages of Abisi, Koda, and Ptsa in Kareli district. The GOG claimed (still unconfirmed) on August 17 that Russians mined the Chuberi bridge in Svaneti (leading to the Kodori Gorge) and Georgian experts were seeking to demine it. Local media reported on August 17 that Deputy Chief of Russia's Armed Forces General Staff Anatoly Nogovitsin announced Russian soldiers had taken control of the Enguri hydro-electric station.

13. (SBU) The French Ambassador to Tbilisi traveled to Gori on August 16, along with a representative of the European Parliament and Deputy FM of Bulgaria. He reported that Gori is largely deserted, with no Russian troops and few residents. He said a Turkish humanitarian convoy reached the city on August 16. The French Ambassador said more food supplies and open humanitarian corridors are needed. NSC Secretary Lomaia (who met the French Ambassador in Gori) reported that Russians control the road from Gori west to Khashuri, and are establishing checkpoints all along it. The German Ambassador reported that Russian soldiers are establishing checkpoints at all major intersections between Kutaisi, Senaki, and Poti in Western Georgia.

13. (SBU) UNOMIG observers have seen at checkpoint S-16 on the M-27 road (main highway) Russian regular forces building a HQ type area where they have placed mortars and D-30 field guns (south of Zugdidi), which are pointing north. UNOMIG also reports the Coast Guard station in Poti is now deserted and the Zugdidi sector is relatively calm. UNOMIG observers have not yet found any confirmation to indicate that Russians used cluster bombs in the Zugdidi sector. (Embassy note. We hope to have observers on the ground in western Georgia on August 18. End note.)

14. (C) OSCE military advisor Steve Young had a limited report, as their observers have been pulled back and cannot enter Gori. OSCE's military advisor expects to have a meeting with JPKF Commander in South Ossetia Kulakhmetov on August 18. Kulakhmetov held talks directly with General Borisov, who is the Regular Russian Army commander currently in charge of Russian forces in Gori. On a side note, the

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Young said that he is being bombarded with offers of "bodies and cars" from Vienna, but he is holding them at arms length at the moment. He and others on the ground are drafting up their requirements to send in before they are given "help" which is not so useful.

15. (C) Embassy observers confirm that Russian forces blew up a railroad bridge east of Gori on August 16. The bridge is near the village of Karakaji (west of Kaspi, whose train station was bombed earlier), lying 16 km east of Gori and 60 km west of Tbilisi. Two tracks run across the 220 meter-long bridge. One span (of six) has fallen, one pillar is damaged, and one pillar is destroyed. Georgian railway engineers reportedly believe that the bridge can be repaired in ten days, with the necessary parts. Railroad cranes are already on the scene beginning repairs. (Comment: DAO confirmed regular Russian forces blew the bridge (reported septel), counter to official Russian statements denying culpability. The Armenian government is quite concerned about the loss, as they are dependent on Georgian railways for shipping cargo. End comment.)

16. (C) GOG reports allege that Russian helicopters started additional fires near the village of Kaspi. Approximately 400 hectares are now reportedly burning in the Borjomi-Kharagauli national park. Additional press and government reports say Russian forces have refused to allow Turkish and Ukrainian firefighting airplanes to enter Georgian airspace and combat the fires. The GOG claimed also on August 16 that houses in the village of Gamdlitskaro near Kaspi were being fired by Russian soldiers.

#### International Efforts -----

17. (U) Distinguished visitors continue to arrive to Tbilisi. German Chancellor Merkel met President Saakashvili August 17 and they held a joint press conference during which Merkel called on the Russians to withdraw immediately and offered German support for Georgia's reconstruction. U.S. Senator Joseph Biden is also visiting Tbilisi August 17. The press is reporting that UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown will arrive

on August 18. David Cameron, leader of UK's Conservative Party was in Tbilisi on August 16 to express support for Georgia's democracy.

18. (C) Press reports state that the Russians have agreed to begin leaving mid-day August 18. General Borisov (the Russian Airborne commander in Gori) was quoted as saying that his troops were the first in so they would be the last out. Ambassador Holbrooke, who visited Gori August 16, told the Ambassador that when he met Borisov, the General was drunk and unsure of what his orders would be August 17.

TEFFT